

MAPPING THE JOURNEY TOWARD THE PRINCIPALSHIP: USING STANDARDS AS A GUIDE

This article presents the findings from a longitudinal study of pre-service principals during their required internship. The authors investigated interns' perceived acquisition of skills to meet licensure standards using scaled scores on the Colorado Standards Knowledge (CSK) instrument and structured reflective journaling. The findings revealed interns' perceived increased knowledge of the standards and the integration of the standards throughout their internships. This indicated that requiring guided reflective journaling throughout principal internships clearly incorporated the broad knowledge outlined by the standards established for principals.

The expectations of K–12 principals continue to change as the context of education changes. Principals are expected to be staff developers (Derrington & Sander, 2011), and instructional leaders, who facilitate collaboration, build cohesion among stakeholders, and influence student achievement (Robertson & Webber, 2000; Tucker & Coddling, 2002; Waters, Marzano & McNulty, 2003; Wilmore, 2002). There is a constant stream of political and social pressures for school leaders in the United States to champion educational reform. This shift has increased the need to revise the approaches to best prepare school leaders (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, Orr & Cohen, 2007). Although they have been critiqued as slow to meet expectations (Hess & Kelly, 2006; Levine, 2005), preparation programs have made efforts to improve (Young, Petersen, & Short, 2002). Innovative and exceptional programs have also been recognized (Darling-Hammond et. al., 2007; Jackson & Kelly, 2002; Orr, 2006). Several components of exemplar programs have been identified, including attention to standards and implementation of internships. Our research examines the role of the internship in fostering knowledge and skills with respect to the state standards. Our conceptual frame was that pre-service principals learn how to become principals through authentic practice (internship) aligned with standards and reflective journaling. Standards were an evaluation tool to measure the learning that occurred during the internship. Thus, we collected data that integrated standards, internships, and reflective journaling.

This article presents the findings of a longitudinal study of three principal cohorts during their required 300 hour, academic-year internship. The goal was for interns to demonstrate proficiency on the state of Colorado Principal Standards, which align with the Interstate Leadership Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards (Roach, 2007), which are broadly implemented throughout the United States. Interns reflected on their experiences at regular intervals. This study focused on their reflections aligned

with the eleven Colorado principal standards. Interns' narratives from open-ended structured questions and scores from the Colorado Standards Knowledge (CSK) instrument were examined. The subsequent section is a summary of the literature on standards, internship, and reflection.

Standards

Standards are a part of American education practices from pre-Kindergarten to the university level (Murphy, Yff, & Shipman, 2000; Ravitch, 1994). They were established for educational leadership in the late 1990s (Jackson & Kelley, 2002). The Interstate Leadership Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards were designed to promote improvement in educational leadership (Murphy, 2005). They are the most widely used, and have been adopted by nearly all 50 states (Roach, 2007). Roach, Smith, and Boutin (2011) assert that the "ISLLC standards have had great impact on state administrator policy, and the standards are infused throughout policy in licensure standards, assessment, program approval, mentoring and induction programs" (p. 97). Principal licensure candidates are generally held accountable for the designated state principal standards through state licensure exams. Accreditation agencies such as the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) have made standards a part of their requirements of programs (Orr, 2006). NCATE's influence on program approval is vast in the US and continues to grow (Roach, et al., 2011). Although the positive and negative impacts of principal standards has been established in the rhetoric on principal preparation (English, 2000, 2006; Murphy 2005; Murphy, et al., 2000), they have become necessary for principal preparation programs to address. Standards-based curricula aligned with several components, such as an internship experience, have been recognized as a common component in exemplar programs (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007).

Internships

An internship experience is an important, if not necessary, aspect of principal preparation (Black & Murtadha, 2007; Wilmore, 2002). Brown- Ferrigno and Muth (2004) report "preparing future school leaders requires that candidates be immersed in authentic learning activities that produce real products used by schools where the work is conducted" (p. 476). Critics of principal preparation programs have recognized the importance of the internship or field-based experiences (Grogan & Andrews, 2002; Levine, 2005; Williamson & Hudson, 2001). Several factors challenge effective implementation of internships. The ideal internship "is a full-time, year-long paid internship" (Wilmore, 2002, p. 105). Most candidates, however, are teaching full time while completing their internships at their home schools (Levine, 2005). Successful internships include master principals who are quality mentors for the interns. An excellent principal

who is not an excellent mentor does not have the same impact (Williamson & Hudson, 2001). Internship requirements differ among preparation programs. In an evaluation of successful programs, Jackson and Kelley (2002) examined six programs identified by leaders in the field. Internships varied greatly (e.g. mentor nominated and carefully screened 700-1400 hour internship with required release time for interns, 540 hours with no release time, to 120 hour internship requirement).

Reflection

The process of reflection has been identified as a way to positively enrich internship experiences. Using reflective journaling over time guides interns through the reflective process. It also provides the opportunity to reflect on neutral ground (Williamson & Hudson, 2001). Reflection has been identified as an important exercise in learning and retaining information (Gilley & Maycunich-Gilley, 2003, hooks, 2003). Reflection, however, has been difficult to monitor and assess.

Journey Mapping (Kibel, 2004) is a resource to rectify the issues of assessment, data collection, and monitoring of interns' reflections on their learning. Researchers Grigsby and Westmoreland (2003) describe Journey Mapping as "a real-time internet-based reporting system that promotes reflective practice and continuous learning for students" (p. 1). The Journey Mapping program allows for flexibility in questioning and analysis. Both quantitative and qualitative data are collected. In this study principal interns logged onto Journey Mapping at regular intervals and rated themselves on their progress of their knowledge of the standards (Colorado Standards Knowledge Instrument) and simultaneously responded to open ended questions. With our focus of inquiry being on standards acquisition during the principal internship, our research questions were:

- 1) What are the differences between initial, mid-year, and end of year scores on the Colorado Standards Knowledge Instrument?
- 2) What is the content and nature of the participants' reflection in regards to standards?
- 3) To what extent do the self reported, scaled scores converge with the narrative findings?

Method

This study investigated interns' perceived acquisition of skills to meet licensure standards from the principal internship experience using structured reflective journaling and scaled scores. The Journey Mapping program permitted the collection of both meaningful quantitative and qualitative longitudinal data, because both narratives and scaled scores are completed for each journal entry (Stevenson & Cooner, 2009).

Participants

Candidates from the Principal Preparation Program at Colorado State University were involved in a required academic year-long 300-hour principal internship during the data gathering process. The majority of the principal interns were completing the internship while they were full time elementary or secondary teachers in districts dispersed throughout Colorado. Their supervising principals served as mentors. It was the responsibility of the principal intern and the mentor principal to ensure exposure to a variety of experiences that could lead to mastery of principal licensure standards.

The available sample was comprised of three cohorts with a total of sixty students; 30 males and 30 females; 10 with 0–5 years of experience; 22 with 6–10 years of experience; 13 with 11–15 years of experience; and 15 with more than 15 years of experience. The equal number of males and females occurred by chance.

Data Collection and Analysis

Participants were trained on the Journey Mapping program during the summer session prior to their internships. Each participant was given an account and password to access his/her journal page. Participants simultaneously wrote entries and scored themselves on their knowledge of standards bi-monthly during the first semester and monthly during the second semester. The questions were the same for each entry. All information was stored electronically. Journals were monitored for frequency and completion.

Reflective entries. Initial guiding questions in the journal were open-ended. Three questions prompted interns to reflect on successes, challenges and concerns:

- 1) What has worked well in your internship over the past two weeks? What successes have you experienced?
- 2) Describe a challenging situation or incident that you encountered during the past two weeks in your internship. How did you initially approach the situation?
- 3) What concerns do you currently have regarding your internship? How might these best be addressed?

Reflective entries were examined through the analytical deductive coding strategy Template Analysis (University of Huddersfield, n. d.). Journal narratives were initially coded for each of the eleven principal standards under three categories: successes, challenges, and concerns. Once initial codes were established, they were isolated to check for accuracy in coding placement and if necessary placed under a different code. Frequency tables were created to analyze the content. Miles and Huberman (1994) list three reasons

to tabulate frequency of qualitative data: “to see rapidly what you have in a large batch of data; to verify a hunch or hypothesis; and to keep yourself analytically honest, protecting against bias” (p. 253). Numerical information revealed patterns that were further examined in the narratives.

Scaled scores. Participants were also asked to rate, on a 6-point Likert-type scale, their perceived knowledge of the eleven principal standards designated for Colorado. The scaled scores of the Colorado Standards Knowledge Instrument (CSK) were analyzed using a non-experimental comparative approach (Stevenson, Cooner & Fritz, 2008). Initial, mid-year, and final scores were examined. The six-point scale on the CSK instrument was labeled a through f. Each point was defined from the teaching and learning context where; (a) minimal exposure; (b) teaching to others; and (c) considering oneself an expert are considered different degrees of learning. Annis (1983) found in a university classroom study on peer teaching that those who taught demonstrated greater understanding than those who did not. Annis states “...a common saying is that the best way to learn something is to teach it” (p. 39). This observation supports the descriptors for letter values for the six-point scale. Interns rated themselves on each of the eleven Colorado principal standards.

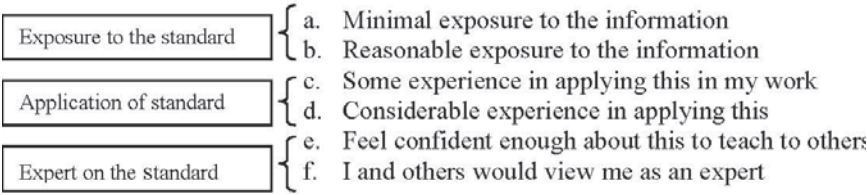


Figure 1. Colorado Standards Knowledge (CSK) Scale.

Findings

The following findings are based on both the scores with which interns rated themselves on the CSK instrument and their journal entries.

Standards Learned Over Time

Principal interns rated themselves favorably on their knowledge of standards throughout the internship experience. The minimum possible score for one entry was 11 and the maximum possible score was 66. The results indicated a statistically significant difference from initial to mid-year ($t = 8.18, p < .05$) and mid-year to final ($t = 13.99, p < .05$). In addition to statistical significance, practical significance was suggested by larger than typical effect sizes (Cohen, 1988). This finding indicates candidates’ increased knowledge of the standards throughout the internship experience. There also was an almost equally distributed change in mean scores,

showing growth from the initial to mid-year (11.283), and mid-year to final (12.136). While the self assessment of interns' progress on the achievement of the standards was favorable, their journal entries chronicled the experiences that developed their understanding.

Journal Reflections

Overall, interns addressed a Colorado Principal standard in their reflections 1,152 times. From those responses, 590 referred to descriptions of successes, 456 mentioned discussion of challenging situations and 106 related to discussions of concerns. Interns wrote meaningful reflections that celebrated their successes and demonstrated their struggles. The quotes below are examples.

"I began to think about all the responsibilities that a principal has. The decisions that have to be made, and the composure you must maintain. As I complete my internship, and begin to apply for jobs I know I am ready to accept this responsibility."

"Is being a principal what I really want to do? It seems like such an isolated job. I don't know if I can be "center stage" without my moral being taking a hit."

Having access to opportunities to experience the standards was the overarching constructed theme for successes, challenges and concerns. Examples of successes that illustrate this theme are:

"EXCITING! The past week I have had the opportunity to head up the hiring of our new department member. I was assigned to come up with interview questions, schedule and conduct interviews, and hire the position."

"This has been an amazing adventure. I have learned so much about what it takes to be a principal. More than just how to manage a building and balance a budget. I have learned how challenging it will be to work with so many different personalities and learning styles. I feel that this will be a continuous learning process and one that I hope will continue to be perfected."

Although we anticipated interns to identify challenges as roadblocks, they were often referred to as excellent opportunities to gain experience. These moments stretched the interns to apply their knowledge and work out of their comfort zones. Therefore challenges were not considered negative; rather they were authentic opportunities needed to be proficient in a particular standard.

"I filled in as principal. Well the experience started out with a bang. Our early childhood center was making cotton candy and it began to burn which set off the alarms. I was phoned by the secu-

rity system that is not a pull but a true alarm, so I had to evacuate the entire building. The fire department arrived, did an inspection, I filled out the reports and the students reentered the building 45 minutes later. Before I knew the source of the alarm, I had a streak of fear pass through me. (I’M RESPONSIBLE).”

Situations viewed as road blocks to mastering the standards were written as concerns. Concerns were not identified as frequently as successes and challenges. When standards were referred to under concerns it was often because the intern did not feel he/she was given the opportunities necessary to be proficient in a particular standard. There were 106 entries coded for concerns. Interns had written “no concerns” 144 times. There were far more “no concerns” than concerns overall. Examples of concerns are:

“Still wanting to be a part of the FTE [Full Time teacher Equivalent] discussions and establish a site based decision making process that enables all stakeholders’ voice[s] to be heard and honored.”

“I’m still wanting experience in a few areas—mainly scheduling and personnel issues...”

“My main concern is I still feel I need more genuine experience. I don’t see how this can happen while I am a teacher and not sitting in the principal’s chair.”

“I am not being asked to participate in student and parent meetings that involve disciplinary issues or parental concerns.”

The frequency of each standard mentioned under the three categories (success, challenge, and concern) is listed in table 1. Frequency indicates how many interns ($n = 60$) wrote about a particular standard under the different categories. It does not refer to the number of times standards were addressed. For example, one intern may have written about a particular standard several times.

Table 1

Success		Challenge		Concern	
Standard	Frequency	Standard	Frequency	Standard	Frequency
1	42	8	40	3	26
8	40	3	36	9	19
3	37	2	34	2	9
2	32	1	32	6	6
6	31	11	28	7	6
11	28	6	21	8	6

(continued)

Table 1 (*continued*)

Success		Challenge		Concern	
Standard	Frequency	Standard	Frequency	Standard	Frequency
4	25	7	21	1	4
9	24	9	18	10	2
5	19	10	13	11	2
10	14	4	10	4	1
7	12	5	8	5	0

Note. Standards: (1) Foundations of Leadership, (2) Contextual Understanding, (3) Planning and Organization, (4) Content Knowledge Instruction, (5) Individualization of Instruction, (6) Management and Evaluation of Instruction, (7) Supervision of Personnel, (8) Supervision of Student Conduct, (9) Resources, (10) School Site Safety and Maintenance, (11) Parent and Community Involvement.

Patterns across successes, challenges, and concerns were found. Several standards were similar in frequency for all three categories. The complexities of the contemporary principalship were recognized by the interns. Standard 2, Contextual Understanding and Standard 3, Planning and Organization, were high in frequency for successes, challenges, and concerns. The job is difficult to manage. A constructed theme was a general struggle among interns to find a work-life balance. Examples encapsulating the interns' experiences with contextual understanding are:

Success: "Additionally, the principal has asked me to write a Soapbox for the (newspaper) in support of Early Release. The Soapbox will be from the (school) staff. I am pleased that the principal trust[s] my professionalism, skills and abilities in this visible arena."

Challenge: "One challenge during the textbook adoption process was getting a group of 15 people (teachers who taught 6th and 7th grades) to agree on anything. I had forgotten how many opinions are shared during such a process. It was incredibly frustrating. Of course all opinions were valued but it seemed to me to be a case of 'too many cooks in the kitchen'."

"We recently had a student pass away and that was, obviously, a very trying time. He passed after a long bout with cancer but the end was traumatic for all involved. I initially approached the situation with shock and denial."

Concern: "I was part of a task force asked to set up the professional development for all elementary teachers during our last district Wednesday. We had put about 8 hours into planning the 1.5 hour workshop, when we were informed that the perspective

of our workshop was expanding based on feedback from some of the elementary principals who do not agree with the direction the district is going along the lines of critical thinking and mathematics. Welcome to the politics of education.”

Interns’ experiences with Planning and Organization, Standard 3, are illustrated with these quotes:

Success: “I have been able to experience the art time management and learning to set priorities which I know is an important administrative trait. I feel confident that I can seek the help of others in crisis and manage to accomplish the required tasks.”

Challenge: “The challenge to this situation was my ability to find/have time for other things that needed to be done, when the meetings took up a lot of time during the day. Organization is very important and your ability to multi task is critical to be successful.”

“Thank God for plans B, C and D, when A is not going to work at all.”

Concern: “time management is definitely a problem.”

“One goal I have is to learn more about how some of the principals organize themselves.”

Overall, frequency of standards in successes and challenges were closely aligned; which further supports successes and challenges as learning opportunities (positive experiences). Standard 8, Supervision of Student Conduct, was highest in frequency for successes and challenges. Working with the students from an administrative perspective was very important to the interns. The responsibility to the entire student body, versus a classroom of students, was recognized. An example of the impact an intern felt when implementing a school wide program, Positive Behavior Support, is shown in the quote below.

Supervision of Student Conduct: “I am a member of our Positive Behavior Support (PBS) training group, a new program we have implemented this year. As a result of the school wide training, for both staff and students, the overall climate of our school has changed dramatically. After one month, our office referrals are down over 65%, compared to the first month of school last year. We attribute this directly to the PBS training.”

While PBS was used as an example of successful student behavior management, discipline was also identified as a challenge.

“Discipline. Discipline. Discipline. We have had so many kids acting out inappropriately. We have had kids vandalizing the restrooms; we have had two fights that ended with bloody noses. We have had kids cussing at a teacher. This type of work is time consuming and emotionally draining”

Standards addressing instruction, including 4, Content Knowledge and Instruction, and 5, Individualization of Instruction, were low in frequency. Interns scored themselves favorably on the CSK for standards 4 and 5, but rarely wrote about them in their journal entries. No entries for standard 5 were written as a concern, and one entry for standard 4 was identified.

Gender and Years of Experience

The attributes gender and years of experience did not show a statistically significant difference or interaction (over time). Several of the narratives supported the similarities between genders and between different levels of experience. When narratives were analyzed further, however, strong themes that differentiated the two did not emerge.

As for years of experience, successes and concerns were not analyzed for emerging themes because of the similarity in the number of answers for each level of experience. Identified challenges did vary enough to warrant further analysis. Those with 0–5 years and 11–15 years of experience were mostly challenged by standard 8, Supervision and Student Conduct. Standard 2, Contextual Understanding, was the greatest challenge for those with 6–10 years of experience. Finally, standard 5, Content Knowledge Instruction, was the greatest challenge for those with more than 15 years of experience.

Discussion

The findings revealed interns' perceived increased knowledge on the standards throughout the internship. Increase on the CSK from the beginning of the year, mid-year, to the end of the year supports the need for yearlong internships. Growth may, however, continue to increase if the duration of the internship was increased. Participants' reflections illuminated how interns experienced the standards.

Short (1997) identifies guided journal entries as one of the most significant strategies for meaningful reflection. The quality of the journal entries collected for this study supports Short's views. Interns wrote serious entries that expressed raw feelings and deep thinking. They included the good, the bad, and the ugly. The narrative findings indicated the alignment of standards with the internship (Wilmore, 2002). Interns reflected on the access they were given (or not) to accomplish the different standards. The narratives revealed that standards were used as a framework to focus the experiences interns sought.

Reflections on standards that address instruction were low in frequency. We wonder if this is because interns were teaching and didn't recognize the instructional components as part of the internship. This could illustrate the barriers other aspects of the present job have to instructional leadership. The managerial parts of a principal's job must be executed well

before he/she can be an effective instructional leader (Robertson & Webber, 2000; Tucker & Coddling, 2002; Waters, Marzano & McNulty, 2003; Wilmore, 2002). Therefore, it is positive that interns were engaging in practices to improve their managerial skills during the internship. Our concern, however, is whether they received the experiences they needed to facilitate instructional leadership in the future. This may be something district induction and mentor programs need to address once candidates are practicing principals.

Gender and years of experience did not factor significantly into the scores. Both men and women perceived themselves to be equally successful. The difference discovered among the narratives between males and females was only identified for one standard: 11, Parent and Community Involvement. The difference was not about competency of either gender; rather it was in the different approaches used by them. Females mentioned building relationships more often, while males wrote about the political context of parent and community involvement and resolving conflicts with difficult parents. The program appears to equally prepare future principals with all levels of experience.

Recommendations

Further inquiry into the acquisition of standards and the effects of reflective journaling is necessary in order to generalize the results, as this study is delimited to one university. Because this study was isolated to examine the internship and reflection, other program components were not considered. Portfolios, internship logs, and case studies emerged as themes connecting the interns' experiences to the standards. Further analysis of these components and the potency they may have for standard integration would be beneficial. They may in fact have a more explicit impact on the integration of the standards than the scaled scores and the open-ended journal questions.

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